

At sea, the elephant seals can dive as deep as 3,000 feet in search of food: rays, skates, rat fish, squid, and small sharks. The females eat nothing while they are giving birth, nursing, and mating, and the males go without food for up to three months at that time. They are preyed upon by killer whales and sharks. Average life expectancy is about fourteen years. The male is mature at five years and the female at three.

History

Año Nuevo Point was named on January 3, 1603 by Father Antonio de la Ascension, chaplain for the Spanish maritime explorer Don Sebastian Viscaíno. A few days earlier, the ship's company had gone ashore at Monterey for wood and water, but they did not land anywhere near Año Nuevo. If they had landed, they would have discovered that the area was occupied by the Quroste, a group of Ohlone Indians, who lived here at least on a seasonal basis in order to hunt, fish, and gather abalone and other shellfish from the sea. The Quroste also collected chert from the beach for use in making spear points, knives, scrapers, arrow points and other tools. This high-quality beach chert was also valuable in trade and has been found at Indian archeological sites in the coast ranges and central valley. Conversely, obsidian spear points from the eastern Sierra have been found in the middens at Año Nuevo.

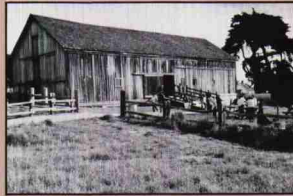
Ohlone contact with Europeans finally occurred in 1769 when the Spanish "Governor of the Californias," Gaspar de Portola, led an overland expedition northward as far as San Francisco Bay. After Mission Santa Cruz was founded in 1791, hundreds of Ohlones including the Quroste were baptized and brought into the mission where they contracted various European diseases, lost contact with their native culture, and died in great numbers.

Año Nuevo was used as pastureland by the missionaries. It became a private rancho in 1842 when Governor Alvarado officially granted the area to his uncle, Don Jose Simeon de Nepomuceno Castro, a prominent resident of Monterey. In 1851, Castro's heirs sold the 17,753-acre rancho to the rough and tumble American frontiersman, Isaac Graham.

In 1861, a subsequent owner sold land adjacent to Año Nuevo to the Steele brothers who developed a very successful dairy operation that continued for some 80 years. The old barns and other historic buildings at Año Nuevo are relics of the Steele Brothers dairy.

After World War II, changes in the dairy industry and new irrigation technology brought intensive row-crop farming to the Año Nuevo area. Windbreaks of Monterey cypress were planted (some of which still

survive), irrigation ponds were built, and straight rows of brussel sprouts were planted in the area just east of Año Nuevo Point. The area was purchased by the State of California in 1971 and today recolonizing plants are slowly erasing the scars left by this activity and by the sand mine operation that was carried on during the 1950s near Año Nuevo Point for the construction of State Highway One.



Old Barn (Visitor Center)

As ship traffic increased along the California coast during the early 1800s, the often foggy, rock-strewn shoreline along this part of the coast became well known to mariners as exceptionally dangerous to shipping. Two fine new clipper ships were lost on the rocks between Año Nuevo and Pigeon Point during the 1850s, and other maritime tragedies occurred in later years. To warn mariners, the federal government installed a fog whistle on the island in 1872 and added a five-story light tower in 1890. An automatic buoy replaced the station in 1948.

The State of California purchased Año Nuevo Island and a strip of adjacent mainland in 1958 in order to create Año Nuevo State Reserve, which now includes some 4,000 acres of coastal mountains, bluffs, dunes, and beaches. The rocky 13-acre island is closed to the public in order to protect the marine mammals and birds that nest and breed there.

About Your Visit

Año Nuevo State Reserve is fascinating in every season. During the spring and summer, elephant seals visit the reserve in order to molt. Females and juveniles visit from April to May, the sub-adult males from June to July, and the adult males from July to August. Yearling seals "hang out" during the fall.

Breeding season is December through March. Bulls arrive first, in early December. Females begin arriving in late December and continue arriving until the end of February. Most adults are gone by mid-March, but weaned pups remain until late April.

During the December-March breeding season you can see the reserve only on one of the regularly scheduled guided walks. These highly informative walks have been designed to minimize disturbance to the animals and their natural habitat. The walks are conducted by docents, state park volunteer naturalists, who go through an extensive training program and donate their time as a public service. We trust that their knowledge, enthusiasm, and love for Año Nuevo State Reserve will enhance your visit. Guided walks take about two-and-a-half hours and cover about three miles, much of it through loose sand.

Advance reservations are recommended and can be made as early as October by calling MISTIX at 1-800/444-7275. The entrance fee to the reserve is on a per vehicle basis and must be paid at the entrance station.

From April through November, visitors must obtain a hiking permit to enter the Wildlife Protection Area at Año Nuevo Point. Permits are issued on a first-come, first-served basis from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. April - September, and 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. October and November. Molting elephant seals bask on beaches that are visible from viewpoints along a designated trail.

For current access information call 415/879-0227.

WARNING: ELEPHANT SEALS ARE DANGEROUS!

Elephant seals are unpredictable — and faster than you might think, to look at them. Even on land they are extremely mobile for short distances. The head, which is drawn back to the shoulders at rest, can be extended two or three feet for a quick bite — and their large canine teeth can inflict severe wounds. Battles for dominance between bulls are among the bloodiest of any species, and they can crush a person with their two-to-three-ton weight.

Please Remember!

The following rules and regulations are in effect both for your own safety and in order to protect the plants and animals that live in this reserve:

- Año Nuevo State Reserve is open from 8 a.m. to sunset. Gates are locked at sunset.
- Visitors must be out of the wildlife closure area one hour before sunset.
- Dogs are not allowed in the reserve.
- Harassment or disturbance of wild animals is prohibited by federal law.
- Collecting shells, rocks, wood, plants, or animals is not allowed. All features of this reserve are protected by law.
- Smoking is not permitted in buildings or on guided walks. Fires of all types are prohibited.
- Never get within 40 feet of an elephant seal, and make sure your children don't either. Elephant seals are dangerous wild animals.
- Access to Año Nuevo Island is not allowed. Rangers and volunteer docents will be in the area to assist you.

Take only pictures, leave only footprints.

Año Nuevo State Reserve
New Years Creek Road
Pescadero, CA 94060
415/879-2025



CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

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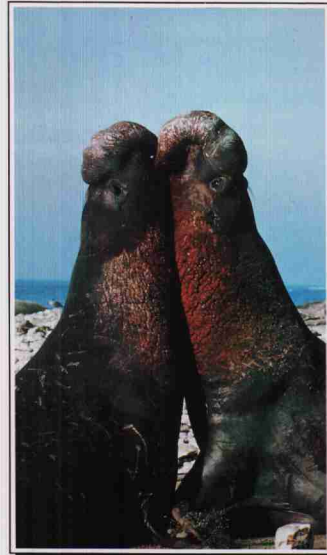
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AÑO NUEVO State Reserve



Northern elephant seal harem.

Front Cover: Northern elephant seals engaging in battle.



CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

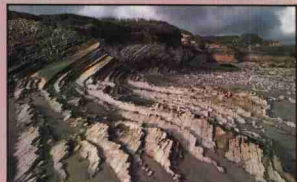
Fifty-five miles south of San Francisco and the Golden Gate, a low, rocky, windswept point juts out into the Pacific Ocean. The Spanish maritime explorer Sebastian Viscaino named it for the day on which he sighted it in 1603. New Year's Point, Punta del Año Nuevo.

Today, the point remains much as Viscaino saw it from his passing ship. Lonely, undeveloped, wild. Elephant seals, sea lions, and other marine mammals come ashore to rest, mate, and give birth in the sand dunes or on the beaches and offshore islands. It is a unique and unforgettable natural spectacle that hundreds of thousands of people come to witness each year.

GEOLOGY

The surf-resistant rock that forms Año Nuevo Point is known as the Monterey Formation. It started out as sedimentary clay and silt, laid down beneath the sea some 12 or 13 million years ago. Since then it has been gradually transformed by time, temperature, pressure, and the addition of silica from the skeletal remains of one-celled sea creatures until today it is a thinly layered, light-gray to whitish mudstone. It underlies much of the reserve and is fairly common throughout the Coast Range.

The Monterey Formation material that forms the point today has been lifted above sea level and shoved northward by tectonic activity along the San Gregorio Fault Zone, which cuts through the reserve. Several small thrust faults associated with the major fault zone can be seen in the cliff face along the south shore of the reserve.



Monterey Formation

In 1603 when Viscaino saw it, Año Nuevo Island was still part of the mainland, an integral part of the marine terrace that still to this day extends out into the sea from the foot of the Santa Cruz Mountains to the east.

The westerly portion of the marine terrace is covered by sand dunes that are migrating from north

to south, driven by the prevailing northwesterly winds. This 300- to 350-acre dune field is one of the few remaining active dune fields on the California coast, most of the others having been disrupted or destroyed by human activity. Here at Año Nuevo the dunes are not being overrun by dune buggies or threatened by development, but they are changing character as a result of decreased sand availability and adjacent agricultural activity.

Irrigation of nearby fields has raised the water table within the reserve and enabled various kinds of plants to get established. Grasses trap the drifting grains of sand. Wild strawberries form mats of runners across the surface, and deep-rooted willow thickets develop. As dune stabilization continues, bushy perennials like mock heather, lupine, lizardtail, and coyote bush appear. Sand verbená, the succulent sea fig, and colorful annuals such as evening primrose and sea rocket hug the surface of the sand and provide both cover and food for mice, rabbits, and other small animals.

LAND ANIMALS

Grizzly bears and other large mammals were once common at Año Nuevo, and grizzlies in particular were a dominant factor in the animal life of this region. They were a constant threat to the Indians who lived here for centuries, and they were still a significant danger for Spanish and early American settlers during the 18th and 19th centuries. It was a grizzly, for example, that killed William Waddell in 1875 near the creek that bears his name. And it was not until about 1886 that the last grizzly in the Santa Cruz Mountains was killed.

Most of the animals that now live in the reserve are nocturnal. Bobcats, coyotes, foxes, raccoons, skunks, weasels, brush rabbits, and black-tailed deer are all regular residents. Bats can also be seen after dark.

Reptiles are often found sunning themselves on warm days. Common western yellow-bellied racers and coast garter snakes eat small rodents and insects. One of the most colorful snakes in North America, the rare and endangered San Francisco garter snake, inhabits marshy areas and feeds on amphibians.

BIRDS

Bird life at Año Nuevo is extraordinarily varied and interesting in every season. In the spring, mallards, pintails, wigeons, and both greenwinged and cinnamon teals can be seen on or near the fresh water pond within the reserve. Migrating waves of warblers, vireos, thrushes, orioles and other land birds

also pass through the area in the spring. Red-winged blackbirds nest near the pond along with the marsh wren. Several species of hummingbirds are present in the reserve and are especially noticeable in springtime when they carry out their spectacular courtship rituals.

Swifts and swallows can often be seen hunting insects above the upland brushfields. Quail, meadow larks, sparrows, finches, and other seed eaters live right in the brush. Towhees, bushlits, and wrentits can be found in both the chaparral and dune areas. Several kinds of hawks and falcons including northern harriers, black shouldered kites, red tailed hawks, and kestrels are often seen hovering above the fields. Flocks of turnstones, sandpipers, and plovers search the beaches and rocky areas for food especially in April and early May before moving north for the summer. Loons, grebes, terns, and brants are also seen during the spring as they pass through this area on their way north, and at least seven different species of gull migrate through the area each spring, most of them on their way to nesting areas in Canada and Alaska. Sanderlings, black turnstones, marbled godwits, willets, and black-bellied plovers are the most numerous shorebirds to be seen during the autumn. Brown pelicans move north from Mexico each spring and can be seen along the California coast throughout most of the year.



Marbled Godwits and Turnstones

But the spectacle is always changing and always fascinating no matter which season you choose to visit the reserve.

MARINE LIFE

The moderate climate of California's central coast region helps make intertidal life at Año Nuevo among the most luxuriant in the world. Air and sea temperatures vary far less from winter to summer than is true in other parts of the world. As a result of this and other factors, tide pools along the rocky shoreline teem with life. More than 300 species of invertebrates

have been recorded at Año Nuevo, including an unusual number of rare species. Common life forms include clams, abalone, limpets, chitons, hermit crabs, and flower-like anemones. Tiny worms build huge honeycomb homes on shallow rocky ledges. Nutrients from seal and sea lion wastes seem to fertilize the lush aquatic plant growth, so that rockfish and bottom fish abound in offshore waters.

Año Nuevo Island and its adjacent mainland beaches make up the most important pinniped rookery and resting area in central and northern California. (Pinnipeds are animals with finlike feet or flippers.) Northern elephant seals are the largest and in many ways the most impressive of these animals to human eyes. Harbor seals are much smaller, and are quite wary and elusive. Two kinds of sea lion are also present: Steller sea lions and California sea lions.



California Sea Lion

The tawny brown or yellowish steller sea lions, which mate on the rocks around the island from mid August, are most often seen on the rocky outer portions of the island. Dark brown California sea lions do not breed at Año Nuevo, but hundreds of them, mostly males, visit the island in September and October when they use the island as a resting place on their annual migration in pursuit of food northward from rookeries in Mexico. The characteristic bark of the males is both loud and incessant and can be heard for miles. By contrast, the forlorn, almost human wail of a female who has lost her pup stands out in sharp relief from the cacophony of the males.

Harbor seals live on the island all year and breed there in April and May. They can often be seen bobbing in the surf just off the reserve's beaches with only their heads out of the water. They can also be seen occasionally on offshore rocks when the mottled pattern of their coats is apparent.

Another pinniped, the northern fur seal, is occasionally sighted on the island and visitors may occasionally spot sea otters offshore, diving for food or floating on their backs. Like the elephant seal,

Sea otters are often spotted offshore, diving for food or floating on their backs. Like the elephant seal,

this animal is returning from near-extinction to reoccupy its former range. A sea otter mother and pup were seen at Año Nuevo in 1980, the first sea otters to enter this immediate area in more than a century.

Throughout the winter months, the telltale 10- to 15-foot spouts of the California gray whale are sometimes visible as they pass the point during their annual migration between their feeding grounds in the Bering Sea and their breeding grounds off Baja California.

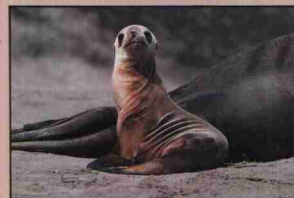
THE ELEPHANT SEAL

Perhaps the most compelling single attraction for human visitors to Año Nuevo State Reserve is the large colony of northern elephant seals that assembles here each winter. These great animals spend most of their lives at sea, and come ashore only to molt, give birth, and mate.

The elephant seal season begins at Año Nuevo in December, when the first males arrive. From fourteen to sixteen feet long and weighing up to nearly 2 1/2 tons, these huge bulls engage in violent battles to establish dominance. The successful bulls do much of the breeding, with most of the duty falling on the "alpha" bull at the top of the social ladder.

In late December the females begin to arrive and form "harems" on the beaches of the reserve. Much smaller than the males, they average ten to twelve feet in length and 1,200 to 2,000 pounds. Six days after they arrive, they give birth to the pups that were conceived the previous year. Normally only one pup is born to each female, and nursing continues for 25 to 28 days.

Ordinarily a mother will nurse her own pup, though if they are separated another female may adopt the youngster. Feeding on its mother's rich milk (55% fat), the pup grows from approximately 75



Young Elephant Seal

pounds at birth to 250-350 pounds in less than a month.

Females come into season and mate about 24 days after giving birth, but the fertilized egg does not implant in the wall of her uterus for about three months. Since the seals' gestation period is eight months, this delay means that the young will be born after the female reaches her breeding ground the following year. The pups could not survive if born at sea. Adult females may mate several times before returning to the ocean, abruptly weaning their pups by desertion. By mid March, most of the adult seals are gone, leaving the pups behind.

When the weaned pups are four to six weeks old, their original coat of black fur molts and is replaced by a shiny new silver coat. Soon afterward they begin learning to swim in the shallow offshore waters. They are very curious, but rather awkward and somewhat afraid of the water at first, but they learn quickly, spend more and more time swimming about, and then, during the last three weeks of April, they go to sea one by one and disperse northward. They feed off the coast of northern Washington and Vancouver Island in British Columbia and do not appear on land again until September.

During the spring and summer months, elephant seals return to Año Nuevo for their annual molts. Females and juveniles molt here from April to May, the sub-adult males from May to June, and the adult males from July to August.

Prior to the early 1800s, hundreds of thousands of northern elephant seals inhabited the Pacific Ocean. Named for their large size and long, pendulous noses, they were slaughtered wholesale in the 19th century for the oil that could be rendered from their blubber. By 1892, only 50 to at most 100 individuals were still alive. The only remaining colony was on the island of Guadalupe off the coast of Baja California.

In 1922, the Mexican government gave protected status to elephant seals and the U. S. government followed suit a few years later when the seals began to appear in Southern California waters. Since that time, elephant seals have continued to multiply exponentially and they have extended their breeding range as far north as Point Reyes.

The first elephant seals on Año Nuevo Island were sighted in 1955, and the first pup was born there in 1961. 872 were born there in 1978. Males began to haul out on the mainland in 1965. A pup born in January 1975 was the first known mainland birth of a northern elephant seal at Año Nuevo; 86 pups were born there in 1978. By 1988/1989 about 2,000 elephant seals came ashore at Año Nuevo and the number of seals breeding and giving birth on the mainland is still increasing.

